COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS BY JUDGE W. C. BENET

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having devoted their life to the service of their country, they went to the grave followed by the lamentations of a commonwealth.

These and such as these are the sweet uses of the study of your history. These and such as these are the duties to be performed by the educated men and women of the South. Then, too, a faithful study of your history will enable you to preserve and perpetuate all those high qualities that marked the **ante-bellum** Southerner—that manly sense of honour that made the South the last asylum of chivalry, that delicate gallantry and reverence for woman, reverence for law, reverence for God.

The Solid South.

A study of your history will also help you to preserve all that was distinctively Southern in the life of the past; all those ties of sympathy which common aims and common dangers bound around the Southern States and formed them into a Southern unity, an unity which the furnace of a four years' war and then hammer of an adverse fate only welded the closer and firmer. A mistaken sentiment would call this solidarity sectionalism; the wise call it patriotism. Patriotism, like charity, begins at home; and shadowy and insubstantial indeed is the patriotism of the man who talks of a transcendental love for "The Union," but whose heart does not within him burn at the thought of the village, the county, the State that gave him birth.

The Avon to the Severn runs,
The Severn to the sea;

or to make a local adaptation

Long Cane to the Savannah runs,
The Savannah to the sea.

and the patriotism of a son of the South has its pure fountain-head in his love for his Southern home, gathers strength and volume in his love for his Southern State, and thus only goes to swell the love for this great commonwealth of the United States, which is its pride, protection and bulwark. This is true patriotism. The Mason and Dixon line may, like the Equator, be an imaginary line, but, like the equator it verily divides the North from the South; and like the equator, it will not be blotted out.

There is an organic community of thought, feeling, and life in these Southern States of which communities and groups of States less homogeneous have no understanding. Let others call it sectionalism and deride the "Solid South;" it is the part of true Southerners to nourish and cherish it as they would their very life's blood. It would be a sad day for the South, and no glad day for the Union should these Southern States ever be indistinguishably merged in the United States when this great Republic would be as monotonous as a Western prairie and the people would present the sameness of a flock of sheep. To be a loyal subject of King George it does not need that a Scotsman, a Welshman, or an Irishman should undervalue or disown the history, the characteristics, the traditions of his own beloved land; and, believe me, you will serve the United States best by remaining faithful and true to the State of your birth.

The Historic Past.

Cherish, then, the history of the South. It is a goodly heritage; and her educated sons and daughters must not suffer it to be sold for a mess of pottage. History is mankind's memory. A people without a history is like a man without a memory. It is the duty of nations and peoples to preserve their history if they would preserve their national life. The Southerner worthy of the name looks with profound veneration upon the history of the South. With reverent eyes he gazes down the long-drawn vistas of the past, and what an inspiring panorama meets his view. There, courtly cavaliers from England landing on the Virginia and the Carolina shores, finding brave employment in encounters with the Red man, and in a ceaseless struggle with nature, transplanting in these new lands of the West the feudalism and the Church of old England. Here, bands of sturdy, God-fearing Scottish Presbyterians from Scotland and the North if Ireland, slowly cutting their way Southward through the valleys of Virginia and along the slopes of the Alleghanies, armed with axe and musket, with Bible and Shorter Catechism, singing the psalms of David in the hearing of the wild Indians to tunes which had been sung by the Scottish Covenanters on the battle-field of Drumclog and by their descendants on the bleak hillsides of Ulster; opening up and settling the piedmont regions of the Carolinas; bringing up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; building an altar to God wherever they erected a fort, and planting a school wherever they planted a crop.

Or, again, those Huguenot exiles from the fair land of France, bringing with them their simple piety and hereditary frugality, and planting their vineyards on the hillsides of the Savannah—and giving their name to this town and county of Abbeville.

Then come the strirring scenes of the Revolutionary War, the shouts of battle, the clash of arms, the long struggle ,the sad defeat, the long-deferred victory, the final and complete triumph. Meanwhile cities arise and towns multiply; and now begins that long and wonderful career of peace and prosperity, hardly checked by the War of 1812, or by the Mexican War;—a career which lasted till the War of the Confederacy. Withal a great age,—an age, moreover, o fwhich a Southerner should be proud—for during that age the rulers of this Republic were chiefly Southerners; and it was during that Southern ascendancy that America was advanced to the front rank among the nations of the earth.

Young men and young women of the South, I counsel you to con that history carefully; lovingly learn the lessons it has for you; so will you encourage in yourselves a pure patriotism, a lofty self-respect, and a conscious pride in being able to say, "I count it an honour to have been born a Southerner."

Southern Literature.

The experience of mankind can suggest no better mode for developing and encouraging patriotic pride and loyalty than the formation of a worthy literature. And this leads us to consider another obligation resting on the educated men and women of the South, the obligation, namely, to foster and encourage the cultivation of Southern literature.

Lest I be misunderstood, let me make clear what I mean. By Southern literature I do not mean something different and distinct from the great body of English literature. The people who speak the same language, who are joint-heirs of the splendid heritage left by Chancer and Spenser, Milton and Shakespeare,—who read the same Bible, and use the same Book of Common Prayer,—who sing the same holy hymns and the same old songs;—that people can have only one literature. They may live in the Mother country, in the United States, in Canada, or Australia, in New Zealand or South Africa, in the East Indies or in the isles of the Southern Seats,—Saxon or Norman or Dane they may be, English or Scottish, Irish of American, they are all English in their literature as they are English in their speech.

It is not my wish to advocate the creation of a literature for the Southern States, a distinctly Southern literature; but I do most earnestly wish that these Southern States would contribute more largely and more worthily to the common stock of English literature.

Am I wrong in suspecting that the healthy growth of literature in the South has been retarded by the manifest effort to make it peculiarly Southern? Witness the many so-called "dialect stories," or 'dialect novels." Certain writers seem to think that a liberal use of "We-alls" and "You-alls," "We-uns" and "You-uns," marks a book as a Southern literary product; and that to spell the words as they are mispronounced by the illiterateand vulgar, proves that we have here a Southern dialect of the English language. The truth is we have no Southern dialect, unless it be the gumbo patois of the Louisiana negroes; ;r the Gullah vocabulary of the rice-field negroes of our low-country,—curiosities in language that our people are not well acquainted with.

In short, therefore—what I mean by Southern literature is simply literary work by Southern writers which for its purity of style and perfection of finish and fine literary taste, shall show itself worthy to become a part of the great body of classical English literature,—a literature greater in variety and ampler in extent than Greece or Rome ever dreamed of.

Good literary work has the same characteristics in all ages, in all languages, in all climes. The testing touchstone is the same, and is the sole and priceless possession of those who are endowed with or have acquired perfect literary taste,—that finest and fairest flower which study or learning can produce, without which wisdom is dull and learning unlovely. The best literary work even has necessarily some local colouring,—provincial marks that denote its birthplace. "Thy speech bewrayeth thee" is as true of a writer of books as it was of the Apostle Peter; but books are classics not because of such provincialisms and local colouring, but rather in spite of them.

How much has the South added to the body of English literature? Has she contributed her due quota? She has produced great statesmen, great soldiers, great orators;—has she produced great writers, great poets, great novelists? It is matter of surprise to strangers and source of regret to Southerners that while there is growing up on this continent an American literature that has traits and characteristics manifestly American, yet those traits and characteristics are suggestive of New England or the North and rarely suggest the Southern States. When the literary foreigner asks to see the contributions the South has made to that literature, the Southerner has to confess that they are indeed few and, with two or three exceptions not very worthily representative of the genius of his country. And yet the stranger meets everywhere in Southern society with men of culture and refinement, and women of exquisite literary taste, meets them in as large numbers as in Northern or British society. Strange contradiction, and yet not inexplicable; for the love of letters is a very different thing from the pursuit of letters, as different as is the reaping of the harvest time from the ploughing and sowing of the Spring. Southern society is characterized by a love of literature as strong as is found in either New England or Old England, but it is a love that reaps where it has not sowed and gathers where it has not strawed.

You may remember what was said and sung on this subject by the bard of the Congaree, J. Gordon Coogler, that eccentric rhymer who believed he wrote fine poetry and did not know that he was writing most delightful nonsense verse. He said:

"Alas for the South! Her books have grown fewer;
She never was much given to literature."

I do not go the whole length with Coogler; but to a certain extent he was correct.

True, the South has not been altogether barren of literary product. We readily recall the names of several Southern authors who rank high in English literature. But after this and more is said, we come back to what we have already confessed—that the South has not done much work that is worthy of her in the literature of her time and language. Her highest genuine, her greatest efforts, have tended more to action and public life than to literary work. What works she has produced are in the main fugitive, holiday work, bearng marks of haste rather than of severe pen-labour and patient study. Fond of reading though she is, and loving to taste the streets of **belles-lettres**, she is for the most part contented to do with literature as she does with corn—to consume more than she produces and to let others produce it for her.

The South a Field of Literary Culture.

And yet—what a field for literary culture the South presents!—a fairer nor more fertile field never tempted the fancy and the pen of man. Here the historian may find tempting work from the heroic age down to the sudden rise and sad eclipse of the Southern Confederacy. Here the biographer may employ his pen in depicting the lives of illustirous Southerners. Here the philosopher, the political economist, and the sociologist may busy themselves with our peculiar problems of life and government.

The lfe and manners of the South from the early colonial times to the Civil War,—where can finer subjects be found for the writers of romance and fiction? The thrilling story of the early settlements has not yet been worthily told, and yet all over this Southern land—yea! in this very land of Abbeville—deeds were done and scenes were enacted in the struggles of the pale-face pioneer and the red Indiaan, of fight and massacre, blood and fire—as worthy to be recounted as the horrors of Glencoe.

The romance of the Revolution has not yet been adequately written, and yet one tale well told of love and war in the brave days of old would do more to keep alive the patriot fire and preserve the fame of your forefathers than a cycle of centennial celebrations. And that ante bellum Southern life, so beautiful, so patriarchal, with its mingled stateliness and simplicity,—who is to preserve for you the tender grace of a day that is dead?—to paint for you the portrait of the fine old Southern gentleman, one of the olden time, with his courtesy and urbanity, living a life of simple elegance and generous hospitality in his home among the woods and cornfields of this up-country, or in his baronial hall amid the live-oaks and magnolias and rice-fields of the low-country. And by his side his wife—the sweet-lipped Southern gentlewoman, stately and beautiful and gracious, with voice ever soft, gentle and low—that excellent thing in woman,—the mother of lovely daughters and proud of her gallant sons; notable in housekeeping and beloved by her humble negroes.

What picturesque and varied accessories are presented for the story of those days,—the campmeetings, the barbecues, the musters of militia; the corn-shucking, the cake-walks, the merry-makings of the light-hearted negroes; scenes worthy of the genius of Robert Burns, the pen of Walter Scott, and the pencil of Hogarth. Alas! Soon will pass away the last of those amongst us who remember those days and those scenes.

Not yet has the tale of the Confederate War been told; and it is well, for, mayhap, the time is not yet. We are still too near those tragic scenes for literary perspective. The events are too recent and real to be softened and subdued by the glamour of Romance, or even to be faithfully recorded by the pen of the historian. Many books have been written by those who fought in that war; but the Southerner writes from the Southern point of view alone; and the Northerner is lacking in magnanimity. The generation who were actors therein must first pass away before the writer of history can calmly judge of those momentous events, or the writer of fiction reproduce with success the heroes and heroines of those days of joy and sadness, hope and despair, of triumph and final failure.

Foreign historians of today are more able to write about that war with justice, calmness, and fairness; as was shown by Colonel Henderson of the British army in his **Life of Stonewall Jackson**, justly regarded by both North and South as the best war book yet published. A sad loss to the South was his premature death in the Boer War, for he had gathered and prepared all the material for writing the life of General Lee. His **Life of Jackson** is worthy of that great soldier, a splended and faithful picture of that Christian hero. It will never be surpassed. It should be a household book in every Southern home.

Thus far I have regarded the writers of prose; but what themes are here for the poetic music! Is there any Southern poet worthy to join the company of the immortals? Only one. Rhymers we have in plenty, but they themselves do not hope for the boon of immortality. And yet, not for lack of material is it that there is no Southern drama, no Southern epic, that there is a dearth of Southern sonnet and song; for this it no

An age and clime
Barren of every glorious theme..

And, full as Southern life is of matter for song and story, Southern scenery furnishes a fitting back-ground and a worthy setting.

What a beauteous land is this!—with all its various enchantments of mountain and river, hill and dale, field and forest, rushing brook and babbling fountain, storm-smit peak and sea-beat shore!—a land worthy as "Caledonia stern and wild" to be "meet nurse for the poetic child." Are these groves, now vocal with song of mocking-bird or the cat-bird's mellow note, never to be sung in tuneful numbers? Are these hills and streams never to be heard of in touching song and winning story? Are the sounds of rural labour in this Southern land unworthy to be heard of in verse,—ploughboy's whistle and the milk-maid's song—the lusty labours long-drawn notes as he hoes the cotton on the cane? Does nobody kiss somebody coming through the cornfield and give occasion for a song as sweet as "Comin' through the rye?" Can no Southern Tennyson sing of a "Talking Oak" whose sap tingles in all its veins to see the Southern maiden listening to the old, old story?

I have looked upon your mountains, beautiful as Ben Ledi and sublime as those Alps beheld from the valley of Chamouni. I have heard the roar of your waterfalls, mightier far than that which comes down at Lodore. I have thrid my way through your mountain fastnesses grander their rugged beatuy of giddy cliffs and listling cargs than the Trossacks in their rugged beauty of giddy and lifting crags than the Trossachs head have I stood in your groves of moss-draped live-oaks, majestic in their beauty, and more beauteous in their giant strength than the immemorial elms of England, solemn in their grandeur as a cathedral, and awful in their silentness as a sacred grove of the Druids.

But in all these scenes there was something lacking,—that something which gives to the scenery of Switzerland and Scotland, the banks of the Rhine and the banks of the Tiber, a charm and an interest not their own. Nature has done as much for Southern scenery as for the scenery of Europe; but it remains for the genius of man to do that for the South which it has done for Europe, to breathe into its natural scenery some of his own life; to touch it with the fire of his imagination; to hallow it with human and inspiring associations, to bathe it in

"The light which never was on sea or land,
The consecration and the poet's dream."

What is there about the yellow river that flows by the walls of Rome to draw to its banks pilgrims from all lands? Are the "banks and braes o'bonnie Doon" so lovely in themselves that tourists will cross the Atlantic to see them? Why is Rob Roy's cave—a little rocky den on the side

of Ben Lomond—an object of deeper interest to Americans than their own stupendous Mammoth Cave? Are not the Mississippi and Missouri, rivers of America, better than all the waters of Europe? And yet one tiny brook on the Scottish Border, the clear-winding Yarrow,—which the shepherd boy, if he does not wade through, clears at a bound—transcends in human interest even the Father of Waters? Would you solve the mystery? Read, then, the three exquisitely beautiful poems on that little Border burn by that lover of nature, the poet Wordsworth, for in them he explains the mystery.

Is not the time coming when these Southern scenes shall have their story too, and a voice that shall speak to the heart of man?—when a Southern poet shall arise and give an immortality of song to the woods and streams, the birds and flowers, the honest men and bonnie lassies of the South? Would that I might be the means today of implanting in the bosom of one of you young Southerners the burning desire to do for the South what Robert Burns, the young Ayrshire ploughman, vowed he would try to do for Scotland. Hear what he said:

I mind i weel in early date,
When I was beardless, young and blate,
An' first could thrash the barn,
E'en then a wish—I mind its power,
A wish that to my latest hour
Shall strongly heave my breast,—
That I, for puir auld Scotland's sake,
Some usefu' plan or book could make,
Or sing a sang at least.

And he did give his native land an immortality of song such as no other minstrel has done in any other age or country; this he accomplished by faithfully nursing the poetic flame until his whole heart was aglow with the sacred fire.

Marvellous is the influence of poetry when associated with natural scenery.

A balmier breath than smell of rose,
A sweeter note than music knows,
A heavenlier hue than morning shows,—
These are the spells,
That Poesie o'er Nature throws
Where'er she dwells.

Surely the time will come when a son of the South will wizard-like cast his spells over our beloved land and with masterly works of fiction do for the Southern States what with his Waverly Novels was done for Scotland by Walter Scott, that Wizard of the North; when a Southern maid will take the place in song of "Bonnie Annie Laurie," and when men will find through all our Southern land tongues in her trees, sermons in her stones, books in her running brooks, and good in everything that is hers.

You will hasten the coming of that day by engaging earnestly in the cultivation of Southern literature. The coming of the man of genius is unheralded, unforeseen, and unexpected as the coming of a meteor. But as surely as a comet appears among the stars, so surely does the man of genius arise among a people who have prepared themselves to receive him, and made themselves worthy of him by their own devotion to learning and literature.

Engage, then, in this good work, not for the purpose of making money by writing books, but from a pure love of letters and a strong love of country. Money you may gain by it, but that should not be the first consideration. The money value of a book has no relation to its real, intrinsic value, else would that extravaganza, "The Four Horses of the Apocalypse"—the sensation of a season,—be worth far more than the immortal "Paradise Lost;" and the forgotten ephemeral "Endymion" of Disrvaeli be more valuable than the "Endymion" of Keats, which will live a thing of beauty and a joy forever.

Cultivate native literature as a labour of love. Like Fletcher of Saltoun, count it a greater honour to make the songs of your people than to frame their laws. Good laws may change and die; good songs will live. Thus will you lay up for your country the only treasures upon earth which neither moth nor rust doth corrupt and which not even time can steal. And thus will you confer upon the land you love greater honour and glary that it is in the power of warriors or statesmen to bestow; for the literature of a nation is its only immortal part. Cities perish, and kingdoms pass away; but a good book lives forever. Ancient Greece and Rome lie buried beneath the ruins of centuries; but on their tombs burn brightly the twin lamps of their literature; and their light is seen in lands Alexander never reached, and their genial influence felt where Rome's eagles never flew.

Communities are lost, and empires die,
And things of holy use unhallowed lie;
They perish; but the intellect can raise,
From airy words alone, a pile that ne'er decays.

Young graduates; if I have succeeded in kindling in your breasts a desire to fulfil the obligations I have treated of, take this as my farewell, and for your life's motto; "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with they might."